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Special Issue of Polish Psychological Bulletin on “Agency and communion in social cognition and behavior”

For the last half-century, the enormous number of research have emerged, evidencing the importance of agency and communion as two fundamental dimensions in perception of self, others and groups (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014, for a review). These “two modes of human existence” (Bakan, 1966) proved to underlie many theoretical approaches not only within the field of social cognition, but also in other fields of psychology like personality or developmental psychology.

The accumulating empirical evidence indicates three major findings: 1) the primacy of communion over agency in language and social information processing (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Abele, Cuddy, Judd & Yzerbyt, 2008; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Wojciszke, Bazinska & Jaworski, 1998; Ybarra et al., 2008), 2) the prominence of communion in the observer/recipient perspective (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi & Cherubini, 2011; De Bruin & Van Lange, 1999; Kenworthy & Tausch, 2008; Leach, Ellemers & Barreto, 2007; Radkiewicz, Skarzynska & Hamer, 2013; Scholer & Higgins, 2008; Wojciszke & Abele, 2008; Wojciszke et al., 1998), and 3) the prominence of agency in the actor perspective (Abele, 2003; Abele & Bruckmüller, 2013; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Wojciszke, Baryla, Parzuchowski, Szymkow & Abele, 2011). These effects are important not only because of their robustness, but primarily because of their functional, adaptive nature. They are driven by the core difference between the actors’ and observers’ goals and motives in a social situations. We seek for communal information when perceiving others as communal characteristics are better indicators of one’s intentions than agentic qualities. The opposite is true for self-evaluations: actors’ main motive is to pursue their goals, which results in increased focus on self-profitable agentic content (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014). This constitutes a valuable approach since over the last few decades social

psychology has been pervasively influenced by the cognitive perspective (Smith & Semin, 2006). And as Susan Fiske noted (1992), the vast majority of social scientists were so overwhelmed by possibilities of cognitive analysis that they seemed to have forgotten what cognition was for. Cognition is for action (Caporael, 1997; Fiske, 1992; Semin, Garrido & Palma, 2012; Smith & Conrey, 2009) and it cannot be treated as neutral or detached but as serving the individual’s motives and goals within the specific situational context (Forgas, Fiedler & Sedikides, 2013). Thus, we can risk a statement that agency and communion are universal, because their adaptive function is central in regulating interpersonal relationships.

For all the above reasons we are happy to present ten manuscripts in this special issue for Polish Psychological Bulletin, which together emphasize the functional nature of social perception and social behavior within two-dimensional domain. They investigate both the contextual (motivational, emotional, cultural) as well as personality factors which are necessary to specify the boundaries of the key findings.

The first paper by Abele, Bruckmüller and Wojciszke, for the first time tests the assumptions of dual perspective model in real interactions. It emphasizes that the very same behavior may have different meaning depending on whether it is considered from the actor or the observer perspective. The next three articles show the importance of goals for social perception and behavior. The studies presented by Baryla investigate the motive of self-interest indicating that liking depends mostly on how the target person influences interests and well-being of the perceiver while respect depends mostly on the social status of the target person. The article by Bocian and Wojciszke corresponds directly with these findings by investigating the self-interest bias in making judgments of others’ behavior. They extend

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their previous findings by showing that people are not aware that their self-interest distorts their moral judgment. And finally, Roczniowska and Kolanczyk test whether direct goal activation affects temporal changes in automatic evaluations of agentic and communal traits. Their studies show that goal activation significantly decreases the value of communal qualities which emphasize the adaptive nature of human cognition. The article by Cislak suggests that cooperation and confrontation may instigate ambiguous associations, and that the general evaluation of individuals pursuing certain strategy depends highly on the context – cooperating with others may be perceived positively in case of a boss, but less positively in case of an employee. Szymkow also accentuates the role of context, specifically the emotional state of the perceiver. The studies indicate that positive feelings may enhance the default strategies in perception of others – in the case of perceiving strangers, positive mood leads to focusing on stereotype-relevant content, that is on communal qualities for woman and agentic qualities for men. The next three articles concern the personality issues: Kalka shows the importance of reinforcing a gender stereotype on participants' identification with this role. Extending their previous findings, Drat-Ruszczak, Bazinska and Niemyjska show that narcissists' aggression is due not only to negative information about their agency but also to positive information about their communion. The article by Czarna, Czerniak and Szmajke further confirms narcissists' disregard for communal domain by indicating that success in a communal domain in the absence of any agentic rewards is unwelcomed. The last paper by Wojciszke and Bialobrzeska confronts the perspective hypothesis assuming that self-esteem is dominated by agency over communion with the cultural hypothesis assuming that self-esteem is dominated by communal concerns in collectivistic cultures and by agentic concerns in individualistic cultures. The data seem to favor the perspective over the cultural hypothesis.

In the latest edition of the SAGE *Handbook of Social Cognition*, Macrae and Miles (2012, p. 8) wrote: "We see it as critical that researchers abandon the view that social cognition is an approach or set of methodological tools, but rather recognize social cognition as an activity that keeps us in contact with our social worlds". The above summary confirms that research within the Big Two domain goes along with this new perspective by accentuating the functional nature of social perception and behavior and by investigating the context to establish boundaries conditions for empirical findings.

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